Bengal saw 693 cases of violence during 2019 Lok Sabha polls

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NEW DELHI: A home ministry report with exhaustive data on political violence in West Bengal citing 693 incidents and 11 deaths during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, and 23 deaths on polling day and the preceding night in the 2018 panchayat elections, helped the Election Commission decide on an unprecedented eight-phase assembly polls in the state.

Even after the parliamentary polls, between June 1 and December 31, 2019, as many 852 incidents of political violence were reported, in which 61 people, including 35 from Trinamool and 20 from BJP, died and 1,508 were injured (800 BJP and 584 Trinamool), the report said.

The home ministry put the total incidents in West Bengal during 2020 at 663, in which 57 people, including 27 from BJP and 25 from Trinamool Congress, were killed and 1,314 injured, including 706 from BJP and 527 from Trinamool. Also, between January 1 and 7, MHA reported 23 clashes, in which one worker each of BJP and Trinamool were killed and 43 people were injured.

Sources said the MHA report dated January 9 served as a key input for the EC in gauging the risk of political violence during the assembly elections and accordingly assessing the requirement of central forces and other security measures in West Bengal. During the panchayat elections in May 2018, the MHA report said no polling was held for 203 zila parishad seats, 3,059 panchayat samiti seats and 16,814 gram panchayat seats, as the

"opposition could not field candidates".
It added that 23 people died in incidents of political violence in the night before and on polling day.

Most incidents during the panchayat polls were in districts where BJP has made inroads, the report said, adding that "violence in these areas was aimed to prevent BJP from deploying its polling agents and restricting voter turnout at the polling booths".

Among the notable incidents mentioned in the MHA report were pelting of stones on BJP president J P Nadda's convoy (December 2020), attack on Union minister Babul Supriyo at Jadavpur University (September 2019), killing of three BJP workers in firing (June 2019) and the mob attack on Babul Supriyo's convoy(May 2019).